

**NOAA Fisheries Announces the
Availability of the Peer Reviews of the
2002 Large Coastal Shark Stock Assessment**

Since 1997, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has been sued numerous times regarding shark management measures. These lawsuits have come from a variety of groups representing commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, and environmentalists. In December 2000, NOAA Fisheries settled two lawsuits with commercial fishermen. The court-approved settlement agreement included, among other things, a requirement for an independent peer review of the 2002 large coastal shark (LCS) stock assessment.

NOAA Fisheries announced the availability of the LCS stock assessment on October 17, 2002 (67 FR 64098). At that time, NOAA Fisheries submitted the stock assessment and the related documents to Natural Resources Consultants, Inc. (NRC) to be independently reviewed. The entire peer review process for the 2002 LCS stock assessment was completed on December 20, 2002. The three independent parties selected by NRC reviewed the LCS stock assessment and, generally, had positive comments. NOAA Fisheries is currently considering how the recommendations of the peer reviews can be applied to the upcoming amendment to the shark regulations in the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks (see the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, November 15, 2002, 67 FR 69180) and the current emergency rule that implements commercial shark management measures for 2003 (December 12, 2002, 67 FR 78990).

If you would like copies of the reviews, please contact Karyl Brewster-Geisz at the Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20910; (301) 713-2347 (phone); or (301) 713-1917 (fax). The peer reviews are also available on the web at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hmspg.html>.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Atlantic shark fishery interests to keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register.

Bruce C. Morehead for January 9, 2003
John H. Dunnigan Dated
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries